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R·I·T

INVENTORY 03 21 -06 20

by

MARIA PROVIDENCIA CASANOVAS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Imagining Arts

School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
College of Imagining Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester NY, May 2011

Approval:

Angela Kelly, Committee Chair

Date

Elaine O'Neil, Committee Advisor

Date

Clarence B. Sheffield, Jr., Ph.D., Committee Advisor

Date

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INVENTORY 03 21 -06 20

By

MARIA PROVIDENCIA CASANOVAS

B.F.A., Fac. Belles Arts. Universitat de Barcelona, 1987

M.F.A., Imaging Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2010

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the essential qualities that make one person different from others, particularly the characteristics of the self that determine identity through vernacular, ephemeral objects and everyday experiences. I aim to examine and formulate questions related to the role that systems, rules and authority play in the formation of that personal sense of uniqueness. Themes addressed include the relationship of the real and photographic verisimilitude and the role of the artist in the process. I investigate these issues by establishing a set of rules to create a photographic inventory of all the objects that entered and exited my apartment during a three-month period, from March 21, 2010 to June 20, 2010. Employing a working method rooted theoretically in conceptual art practices, *Inventory* uses the most common quotidian tasks of the everyday as a means of bringing closer together the art object and life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract	iii
List of Figures.....	v
I. Introduction.....	1
II. Planning the archive	5
III. Collecting data.....	12
IV. Processing information.....	18
V. Displaying.....	22
VI. Conclusion.....	29
Bibliography.....	32

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1 *Measurament: Room*, Mel Bochner, 1969
- Figure 2 *Inventory*, Installation view.
- Figure 3 *Inventory*, Samples.
- Figure 4 *Gas Tanks*, Bernd and Hilla Becher, 1983-92
- Figure 5 Register Book for the *Inventory*
- Figure 6 *The Hotel: Room*, Sophie Calle, 1981
- Figure 7 Following Piece, Vitto Acconci, 1969
- Figure 8 *Time Piece*, Tehching Hsieh, 1980-1981
- Figure 9 Inventory, samples
- Figure 10 *Inventory list*, Video
- Figure 11 *Inventory*. Entrance Installation view.
- Figure 12 *Inventory*. Installation process.
- Figure 14 *Inventory*. Installation process.
- Figure 15 *Inventory*, installation view.
- Figure 16 *Inventory*, Installation view.

I. **INTRODUCTION: INVENTORY 03·21·2011 — 06·20·2011**

It's so tempting to try to sort the whole world by a single code; to find a universal law ruling over all phenomena; two hemispheres, five continents, masculine and feminine, animal and vegetable, singular and plural, left and right, four seasons, five senses, six vowels, seven days, twelve months, twenty-six letters. Unfortunately it doesn't work, it's never even had the slightest hope of working, it will never work.¹

Georges Perec

The initial idea for this project directly emerges out of my experience of living in the United States over the past five years. During this time I have lived a nomadic life, with only belongings that filled a suitcase. I have been living in rented rooms in other people's houses, occupying space and using objects that were not mine. In the summer of 2009, for the first time since I moved to this country, I rented an apartment. On one hand, I could experience the feeling of independence of having my own space; on the other hand, I felt the loss of freedom through the acquisition of a lease, bills and a lot of basic items needed for my new space. I felt I had returned to a "conventional" way of life.

This project responds to the initial desire to control all these objects that have come into my life, to register, sort and classify all of them. Through this action, I felt I could examine and perhaps better understand the rules and conventions that govern our lives by looking into the specific, banal and insignificant part of our lives, which we refer to as the "everyday." I adapted the attitude of seeing the world as it is, which William Carlos Williams expresses in his poem "A Sort of Song"—"No ideas but in things".²

¹Perec, Georges. *Thoughts of Sorts*. (Boston: David R Godine Publishers, 2009). 122

²Williams, William Carlos. *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams: 1909-1939*. (New York: New Directions, 1986).

My interest is to explore the qualities that make one person different from others, particularly the characteristics of the self that determine identity through vernacular, ephemeral objects and everyday experiences. I aim to examine and formulate questions related to the role that systems, rules and authority play in the formation of that personal sense of uniqueness. I explore the relationship of the real and photographic verisimilitude and the role of the artist in the process.

The question of existence or what it is to be, the capacity to feel alive and the complex relationship it has with time and space are central issues of the branch of metaphysics known as ontology. I am aware that this is a complex theme, and I do not pretend to provide any answers. Rather, my desire as an artist is to raise questions. I place myself in a position to try to expand the discussion on role of the individual in society by using my immediate personal daily experiences. I investigated these issues by establishing a set of rules to create a photographic inventory of all the objects that entered and exited my apartment during a three-month period, from March 21, 2010 to June 20, 2010. Employing a working method rooted theoretically and historically in conceptual art practices, *Inventory* uses the most common quotidian tasks of the everyday as a means of bringing closer together the art object and life itself.

The conceptual art framework which informs my work can be traced back to the upheaval in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period characterized by extensive protests erupting all over the world, when every form of authority and order was questioned. In this period, artists were developing new ways of thinking about art, based on such structures of Fluxus, Minimalist, Conceptual Art and Situationism. All four of these movements used repetitive systems as a way to redefine the work of art, individual identity, the nature of representation and its ties to the social sphere.

One of the most characteristic features of the 1960's was the radical revaluation of the art object, i.e., there was a shift away from the autonomous object in an attempt to be more

responsive and closer to the world. The artwork was increasingly determined less by the medium and more by the concept.

Sol Lewitt articulated his position by stating, “In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.”³

Reading George Perec’s *Thoughts of Sorts* (1985) and Pierre Bourdieu’s *La Distinction* (1968) provided immeasurable influence on the approach and tone of this thesis project. I was struck by Perec’s exploration of lived experiences of the individual subject seeking to understand the own reality from the everyday. I was also inspired by Bourdieu’s attempt to reconcile the subject within objective structures. Both provide an underpinning for the concepts around which my process was shaped. Furthermore, critical texts by Roland Barthes, Michel de Certeau and Hal Foster have been essential. Their ideas helped to establish a more critical philosophical position with regards to my individual art practice.

Process is crucial in my conceptual approach. Therefore, the structure of this thesis paper is organized in four chapters that correspond to the four stages of the process that I created. The first chapter is “Planning The Archive,” staged from October 2010 to March 2010. This stage involved creating a set of rules in order to have a system for collecting information. I enumerated each rule, justifying the reasons for the choice. The second chapter, “Collecting Information,” was staged from March 21, 2010 to June 20, 2010, the period when I took photographic images and collected data related to the objects going in and out of my apartment. During this stage I followed the preset rules created in the first stage. I introduced the concept of the everyday and focused on the performative character of the archive. The third chapter, “Processing Information,” was staged

³ Lewitt, Sol. *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, Artforum, June 1967. 80

from June 21, 2010 to September 30, 2010, and describes my time as an archivist processing the information gathered about the 292 objects documented in Stage Two. I examine notions of the archive in art, and I distinguished two different processes of translating information. One was from the object to a visual system of representation—photography. Another was from the photographic image to the system of language. The fourth chapter, “Displaying the Inventory,” lasted from October 2010 to the end of November, 2010. Here I found an effective way to show the inventory and to make choices about its eventual exhibition.

For this thesis project I created a photographic archive of objects with the intention of creating an inventory. I planned in advance in order to create a structure with rules and conventions. Once the system was defined, the project consisted in my experience of following and applying the rules that I had created myself. At this point, what happened during this experience became very important, and it was reflected in the final exhibition.

II. STAGE 1: PLANNING THE INVENTORY 10·01·2010 – 03·21·2011

My main task was to be the rule maker who established a set of rules to create a system for collecting information. Each rule required justifying the reasons of a particular choice. Setting a system of rules, order and discipline created distance between the viewer and what they are seeing. For example, Mel Bochner, in *Measurement: Room* (1969), used the measurements of an interior structure not only to serve to make the viewers aware of their

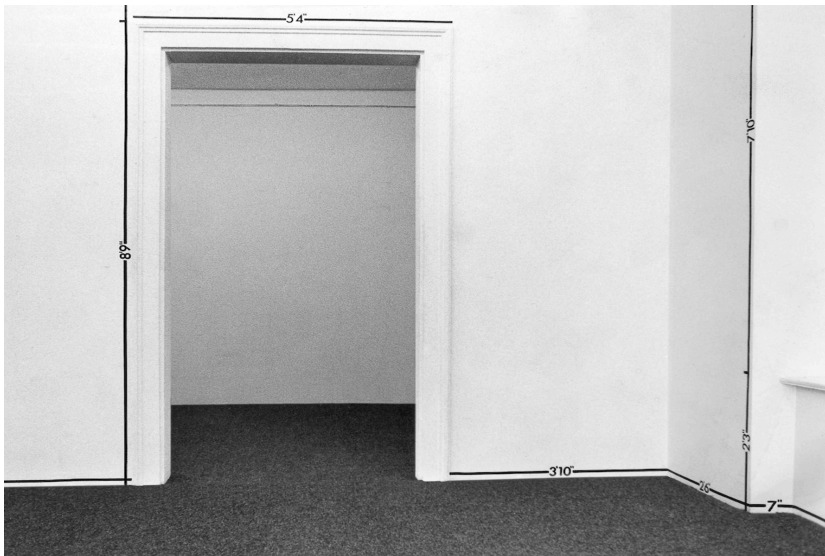


Fig. 1. Mel Bochner, *Measurement: Room*, 1969.

surroundings, but to make them self-aware of the fact that they had become the subject (see fig. 1.). “Measurement is one of our means of believing that the world can be reduced to a function of human understanding. Yet, when forced to surrender its transparency, measurements reveal an essential nothingness.”⁴

The established rules, including an explanation of why these rules were created and which meaning they have within the context of the project, are as follows.

⁴ Bochner, Mel. Quoted in Anne Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality*, (London: Thames & Hudson 2001). 129

Rule 1. The photographic capture and collection of data will begins on March 21st and ends on June 20th

The temporal frame of this project was spring. The seasons are a system of time measurement, a time understood as a cyclical model with specific repeated patterns.

Rule 2. Register only objects that cross the door of the apartment, both from outside to inside and vice versa

In this movement of inputs and outputs, I considered my apartment as a metaphor for self, the outside of my apartment as a metaphor of others, and the door of the apartment as the transitional space or border between them. It is in the doorway where the interaction occurred. According to general systems theory, originally proposed by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, a system can be defined as a collection of interrelated parts forming a complex and unified whole, in which there is often an exchange that goes beyond the boundaries defined by the outside entrances and exits.

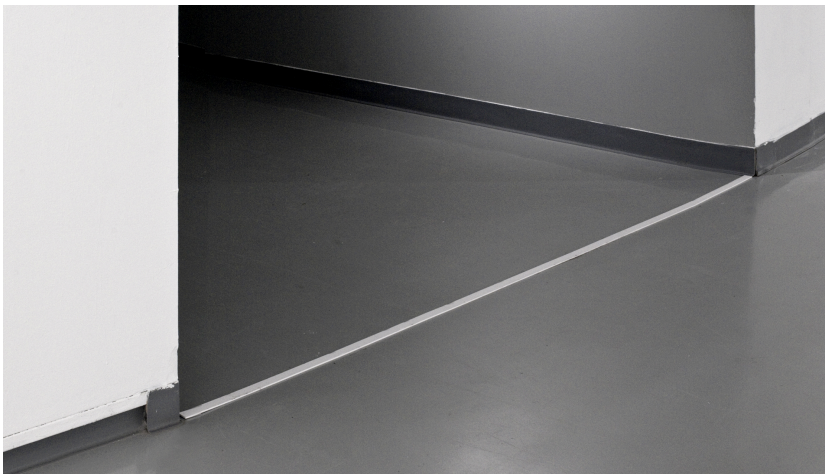


Fig.2. Inventory, Installation view, 2011

In the exhibition, a white line across the gallery entrance represented the boundary of my apartment door and delineated the gallery space as a surrogate for my apartment (fig. 2.).

Rule 3. Registering only objects; people are excluded

We live surrounded by all kinds of objects. These things that accompany us in our lives, many are insignificant objects that we hardly notice, yet they are part of the everyday that not only define our culture and our habits, but also ourselves.

With these rules, I questioned the extent to which my identity is tied to the objects that I use each and every day; how my being and experience are constituted by such things, and to what extent they challenge my freedom, autonomy and agency.

These questions were tied to the fact that more than ninety percent of the documented objects came into my apartment from commercial stores. I could not ignore the clear reference of this inventory to the individual as a consumer as well as the critique of the object as a commodity. Yet, this is not my main concern.

Within this situation, I propose the questions, what position does art occupy, and what is the position of the artist? The role of the artist has also changed during recent decades—from being a model producer, the artist as a source of their work, to the artist as consumer. “Every artist is primarily a user, a consumer of the medium in which he works, and can produce nothing other than that which his chosen medium, be it language, or picture, allows him to produce.”⁵

Rule 4. From the categories of objects excluded, the packaging, and all objects of daily use that come and go every day.

Obviously there were also choices of things not to purchase and aspects of exclusion.

The creation of this rule is to exclude the objects that come and leave every day, for example, plastic bags from grocery stores, keys, wallet, glasses, cell phone from my bag, and

⁵ Groys, Boris. *The Artist as a Consumer*. In Grunenberg, Christoph. *Shopping*. (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2003). 56

the clothes I wear, and also to avoid the repetitive presence of unnecessary objects that overwhelmed my practice.

This rule is related to the choices we face every day, as individuals and also in art practice. John Baldessari's work has been an important inspiration, especially his employment of rule-based systems strategies. He works within and against arbitrarily imposed limits to make choices and find new solutions to problems. His idea is to establish some structure that would not be too strict: "I guess it is a quarrel around your idea, you can move but not too much, and this limited movement provokes creativity."⁶

Rule 5. Each of the objects captured has to be totally isolated, focused, and set on a white background

The stylistic means of articulating this project used a neutral and objective background to represent the collected objects. Describing and reporting only what I could see was motivated by the compulsive action of observation. I offered neither judgments nor opinions, and claimed to eliminate any trace of my personality and emotions. In accordance with Roland Barthes, I was "keeping to the surface of things, examining without emphasis."⁷

I wanted to leave space for the viewpoint of the observer, as Alain Robbe-Grillet did in his novel *Jealousy* (1957), by creating an absent third-person narrator. In Robbe-Grillet's novel, the absent narrator, a jealous husband, silently observes the interactions of his wife, A., and a neighbor, Franck. The narrator never names himself, never uses the personal pronoun "I." "A first-person narrator who, however, never says 'I' and whom one never sees or hears, draws us into an identification with him, installs us in the 'hole' that he occupies in the center of the text."⁸

⁶ John Baldessari. *Art21, Season 9 Systems*. 2009

⁷ Barthes, Roland. *Objective literature: Alain Robbe-Grillet*." In *Jealousy A. Robbe-Grillet*. (New York: Grove Press, 1981) 14

⁸ Morrisette, Bruce. "Surfaces and Structures in Robbe-Grillet's Novels." In *Jealousy*. Alain Robbe-Grillet. (New York: Grove Press, 1981) 9

When a visual artist creates an empty space, the viewer can occupy this position. The object represented changes as well, because it is seen through another's eyes, and their cultural, intellectual, and personal experiences. Roland Barthes claimed, "The goal of literary work is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text."⁹ The dynamic relationship among artist, work, and viewer embodies something of the subjective experience of life.

The aesthetic I used for this project included the elimination of all compositional schemes except those that were very simple and explicit. Through the use of an empty white background, I aimed to neutralize any possibility of placing the objects in any context, including any association with time and space, creating the feeling of the here and now. My goal was an astringent and consistent ground for each object. This strategy makes the viewers interpret and judge their own everyday experience.

Rule 6. The photographs of the objects will be printed at the same size, without respect to scale

The decision to maintain the printed objects at the same size, without considering the proportion between the object and its representation, allowed me to express both the sense of unity of the archive as a whole, and a democratic nonhierarchical relationship between the objects that form the archive.

Gestalt theory states that things that share visual characteristics such as shape, size, color, texture, or value will be seen as belonging together in the viewer's mind. "Grouping by similarity occurs in time as well as space. Any aspect of percepts—shape, size, brightness, color, spatial location, movement, etc.—can cause grouping by similarity, but comparisons make sense only

⁹ Barthes, Roland. *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974). 4

when they proceed from a common base.”¹⁰ The repetition of visual elements such as size creates a rhythm and pattern in the artwork, producing a sense of harmony and unity. In this way every singular object becomes part of a bigger single unity, i.e., the archive.

Size is also a measurement of judgment, which forms a criterion. Maintaining the objects at the same size served to express a mental posture with no judgments. It gave equal weight to everything. No objects in this inventory were more important or nicer than others. (Fig.3)

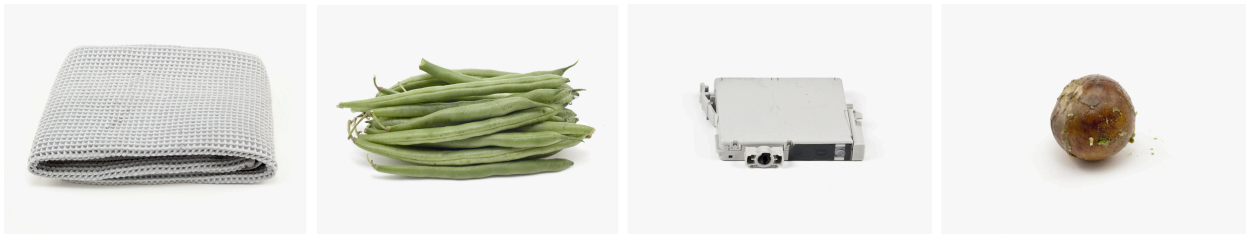


Fig.3. *Inventory*, samples

I was also inspired by the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher. Their preferred presentational mode for their images consisted of groupings of their prints, each print framed discretely or encased within a single large frame in order to facilitate direct, immediate comparison between motifs arrayed without hierarchy, according to type, function, and/or material (Fig. 4.). Comparison of the several components in any of these multipartite works operates primarily at a formal level.



Fig. 4. Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Gas Tanks*, 1983-92.

¹⁰ Arnheim, Rudolf. *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). 8

Rule 7. If I am not able to capture images due to sickness or other reasons, it is acceptable for up to two days

This rule is very strict and tied to myself. It is a rule related to discipline, consistency, habit and routine. Discipline is necessary to follow rules and serves to maintain the structure of the system. This rule is also related to the objects that are not represented in the inventory but which could be there in theory.

III. **STAGE 2: COLLECTING INFORMATION** 03·21-06·20 2011

Spring arrived, the basic rules were established, and the configuration of the photographic studio was determined. I was ready to begin the experience of executing the rules and putting myself in a role that did not correspond to my personality. I am organized, but I am not a systematic person. I do not follow specific routines, and my natural tendency is to live in my ruminations and imagination. Living in the present for me requires a lot of effort. My process includes changing my basic habits and the way I organize my day. This causes me to experience issues of control, order, discipline, repetition and ritual, terms related to the definition of the everyday.

We can define the everyday as the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the background noise, or the habitual. My interest in the common grind of daily life came about first, because it always evokes questions pointing to how we conduct our life. Second, it is also a way to bring art and life closer together. In Rauschenberg's repeated quote, he says that he wanted to work "in the gap between art and life,"¹¹ suggesting the questioned distinction between art objects and everyday objects. And third, it is a way of questioning established structures. As Maurice Blanchot suggests, "the everyday exhibits an absence of qualities that it cannot be approached cognitively, and displays an energizing capacity to subvert intellectual and institutional authority."¹²

Because the everyday is in the sphere of the experience, the routine and the ritual, I executed the process of creating the inventory through maintaining control of all objects entering and leaving the apartment. Each day I kept a register notebook of all the items in two columns: Inputs in one and Outputs in the other. I also registered the day, the time, the origin of

¹¹ Dorothy C. Miller, ed., *Sixteen Americans*, exh. cat. (New York: MoMA, 1959), 58.

¹² Blanchot, Maurice. "Everyday speech" *Yale French Studies*, 73, 18

entries and the destination of departures. In this way I had some control of all objects that I had to photograph each day (see fig. 5.)

Date: 03/29 - 04/04		SPRING 2010	
M (20)	IN	OUT	
Nutella Rice cakes Eggs	Regals Llimones Tiramisu antipasto umales vegans vegans	floor dust Living Room floor dust bathroom 1 Tirita Comprised (2)	
T (30)	Spinach 1 Pepper 1 Zucchini 1 tomato 1 Asparagus moneta tendra 2 bags	Box gift - father's day Left onions Comprised (1)	
W (31)	Caixa map 1 set de fotocopies 1 notificação fed-ex 1 villeres 4th	Caixa	
TH (1)		Restes tomates Restes Pela pepino	
F (2)			
S (3)	Caixa limon Siropo Cayena ticket fedEx	2 closques ous Sobres, esparrecs 3 closques ou tomata Sobres Patata tendra / abocat	
SU (4)	4 Zucchini 2 Pebrots 2 Llimones tunyina	Left overs zucchini (3) Truita cartago 4 closques ous 1 bossa th	

Date: 04/05 - 04/11		SPRING 2010	
M (5)	IN	OUT	
• Llimones (7) • per esprimir Llimona		Sobres esparrecs ous 2 pebrots (2) • infusio 1 check Rent - Zak - Moneta tendra oo/patata	
T (6)		Carto ous Carto xoco	
W (7)		LLimones closques bossa te	
TH (8)	Fotocopies CI Ticket Movie	Filtre aigua rotlle paper wc	
F (9)	7 Llimones	LLimones closques Dust Floor	
S (10)	Xundres plastic • binder • moneder • separadors • piles • Caixa cartro X	Bitamina Crema Saboncos LLimones closques bossa paper	
SU (11)	1 Raba • 3 tomagrets • 1 Api • moneta tendra • Paper unina • 2 Gel Bany • gel porut. • par WC • 3 Llimones	restes: 1/2 raba paper gras patata Saba branca tom uys mmmptes closques Llimones paper 3 bosses	

Fig. 5. Register book for *Inventory*.

The constructed setting limited by a specific space, time and rules, was an artificial space created by myself in which, I would perform attention and control. Working much like a child's game, that space allowed me to have an experience. While working to define this space, I found inspiration in the theories of the British child psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, a cogent description that defines such space as a 'Transitional Space,' a space in-between, which is neither a subjective perception nor an objective reality, but is a third or intermediate zone. Winnicott expresses it in this way: "We experience life in the transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation, and in the area that is intermediate between the inner reality of an individual and the shared reality of the world that is external to

individuals.”¹³ Playing in that space, between the self and the world, allows one to perform and constitute reality. In that space creativity occurs, choices are easier, and formulating questions is freer. When one has an appropriate question, one has more of a chance to find one’s own answer.

Throughout the thesis process, I became increasingly interested both in the documentation of objects and the activity itself. The experience in which I was involved increasingly grew in importance. Recording the objects was no longer my aim. Instead, my main interest was redirected to the action with the camera, which I used as a tool to process the thoughts and emotions related to the experience of performing discipline, order, and repetition. Defining tasks by an emotional distancing, by following the recording of events, and by an act set for myself, this experience allowed me to create images that were records of an activity caused by myself, instead of trying to capture the reality ‘out there’.

Margaret Iversen, who writes on performative aspects of photography in her essay, *Following Pieces: On Performative Photography*, defines this practice as a documentation that does not try to record an image of an event, nor recover its traces. “The photo-document as performative realism does not record some pre-existing object or state of affairs. Rather the camera is treated like an instrument of discovery...”¹⁴ She also points out that the performative “signals an awareness of the way the present gesture is always an iteration or repetition of preceding acts.”¹⁵

Contemporary art provides a number of important examples of this idea. Sophie Calle, in order to execute her project *The Hotel* (1981), took a job as a chambermaid at a hotel in Venice, Italy, where she was able to explore the writings and objects of the hotel guests. Like a detective or crime photographer, she photographed the momentarily unoccupied hotel rooms: the unmade

¹³ Winnicott, Donald. *Play and Reality* (New York: Routledge 2001). 64

¹⁴ Margaret Iversen. *Following Pieces: On Performative Photography* in James Elkins, ed., *Photography Theory*. (New York: Routledge, 2007) 93

¹⁵ Ibid. 97

beds, the stray items left in bathrooms, the contents of suitcases and closets (see fig. 6.). She even read letters left in the rooms.

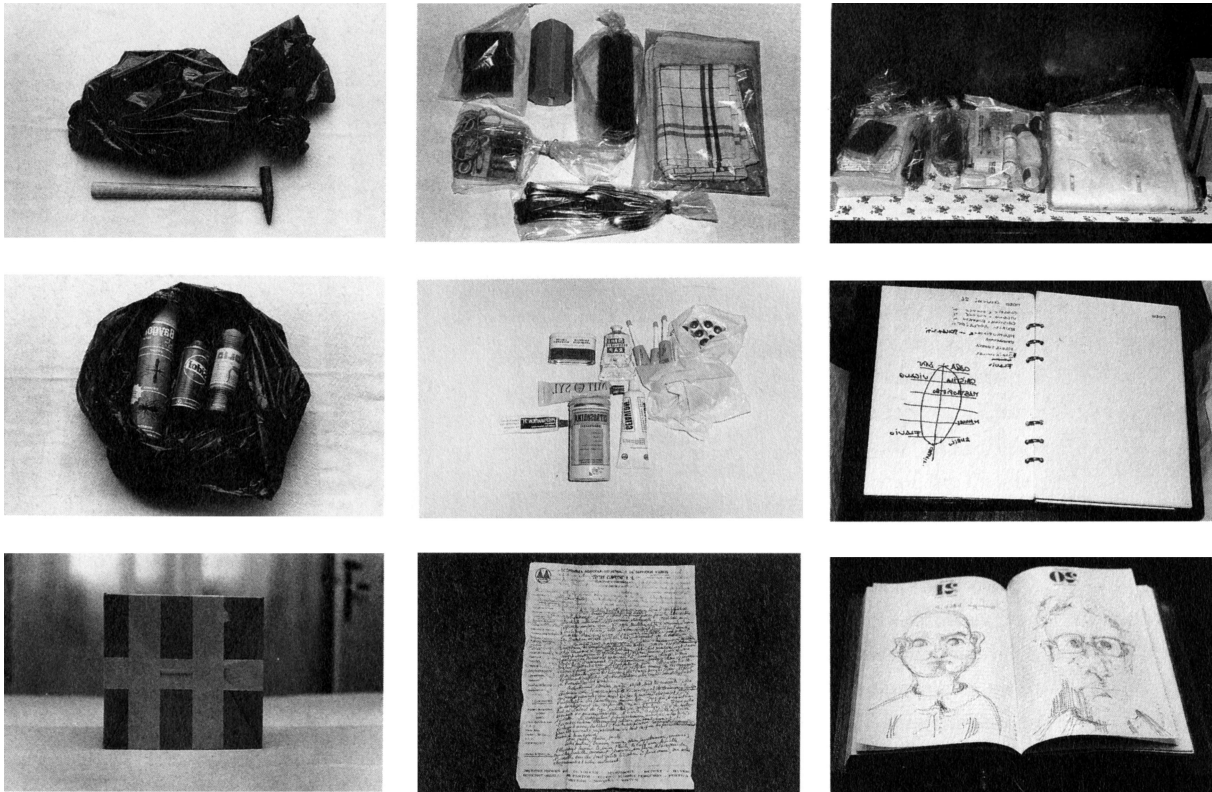


Fig.6. Sophie Calle, *The Hotel*, 1981

Vito Acconci, in *Following Piece* (1969), set himself the task of following a selected person walking in the street until he or she disappeared into a private place where Acconci could not enter. This task was repeated every day for a month (October, 1969). Each pursuit was carefully documented with photos and a time code text, and he typed up an account of each pursuit, sending it each time to a different member of the art community. (See fig. 7)



Fig. 7 Vito Acconci, *Following Piece*, 1969

Tehching Hsieh, in his series of one-year performances, *Time Piece* (1980-1981), explores the limits of his own physical and mental endurance. Hsieh punched a time clock every hour on the hour for one year and documented every register with a snapshot. The final piece was displayed as an installation of photographs, time cards, and a digital video that compresses the year's snapshots into a six-minute time warp. (Fig 8)



Fig.8. Tehching Hsieh, *Time Piece*, 1980-1981

Like *The Hotel*, *Following Piece* and *Time Piece*, my *Inventory* is a project using performative photography because there are elements of task-setting, of subjecting myself to the structure of rules, and also because the recording of an ongoing open-ended event is open to unanticipated consequences. Unlike Sophie Calle and Vitto Acconci, who chose to photograph hotel guests or pedestrians, I turned the camera towards myself, and my movements, much like Tehching Hsieh did in *Time Piece*. Yet, I was never literally present since the objects I had brought

into my apartment came into stand for me.

The performative action is reflected in the images that form the inventory through a careful preconception of how I wanted each object to look. I did make deliberate aesthetic choices. For example, all objects with an elongated shape were placed horizontally. If the elongated objects had some sense of direction, then they had to be placed from left to right (fig.9.). The images of the objects revealed the act of arranging the objects in front of the camera and shooting them every single day.

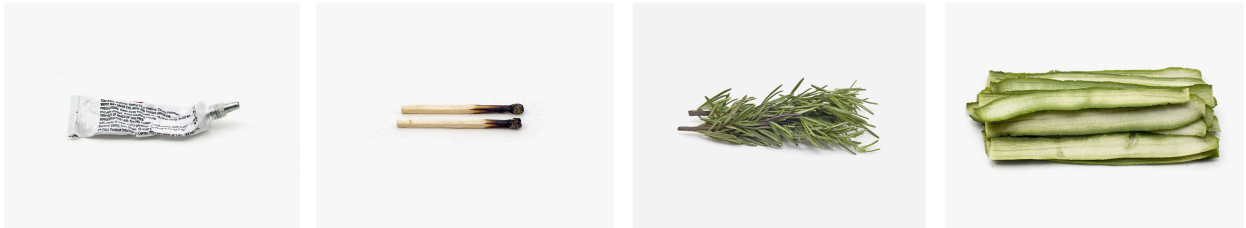


Fig. 9. *Inventory*. Samples

When I began, I knew all I could do was set rules. As a result the inventory would create itself. The task of setting up the objects forced me to be present. This presence was the result of following the preset rules, but while still not knowing what would happen. The final shape remained unknown and uncertain. I did not have any control over the end result of which objects would form the inventory. On June 20, 2010, I translated the result of this stage of the process into the final number of 292 objects captured and recorded.

IV. **STAGE 3: PROCESSING INFORMATION** (archiving, classifying) 06-21-09-30 2011

In this stage I performed as an archivist. My occupation was to process the information collected in the form of the 292 images and daily entries made in my register book, to classify them and to create the archive.

I defined an archive as a deposit or an ordered system of documents and records. One of the features of the modern era has been the importance given to the archives as a means for storing memory in order to recover historical knowledge. From the early twentieth century until the present, artists and thinkers have considered and reinvented the concept of the archive, raising questions related to what constitutes an archive and working to define the relationship that archives have with authority.

Many artists have developed work centered on the archive. For example, Christian Boltanski relates the archive to memory as an existential fact. Hanne Darboven develops "writing systems" in monumental installations, lists and endless columns of figures, connecting the subject of the archive to the concept of time. As I pointed out in Chapter II, my archive / inventory served as evidence of the performance of actions to collect, keep, organize and control information.

According to Jan Verwoert, in order to create the archive, the collected images and data must first become documents. In order for this to happen "the text must be certified as a valuable piece of information."¹⁶ Certification of information as a document is based on authority. "The authority of the producer is generated by the nature of the archive he or she contributes to, just as the nature of its founder conversely determines the authority of the archive."¹⁷

I was the authority that decided what would become a document and would form the inventory, and I decided what would be included and excluded in the inventory. However, since

¹⁶ Verwoert, Jan. *Research and Display: Transformation of documentary Practice in Recent Art*. In Neuerer, Gregor. Ed. *Untitled (Experience of Place)*. (London : Koenig Books Ltd., 2003) 10

¹⁷ Ibid. 10

this project was developed in an academic environment, another type of authority appeared--the thesis committee. My committee members, Angela Kelly, Elaine O'Neil, Chip Sheffield served as a critical part of the conceptual process. The interaction and negotiations that I had with my committee members influenced and formed the creation of the rules that would define the process. The committee members became part of the project. For a previous inventory, my committee signed the agreement document that stated that they authorized the approval of the rules that I intended to apply and execute.

In Stage Two, I translated a real object into a visual system of representation--photography. Stage Three was the translation of the visual representation into another system--language. I gave the subject of each image a reference number for the object pictured. In addition, I created a numeric code for the information related to the object--entry or exit, date, place of origin, description, the ultimate location of each object in my apartment or in the trash.

The translation of a real object into a visual system of representation inevitably involves the relationship between the sign and the object that it represents--its referent. Issues related to photographic representation and questions around how we construct a photograph's relationship to the real arose.

According to C.S. Pierce's classification of signs related to the modes relationship between the sign and the object, indexical type is one in which the signifier is *not arbitrary* but is *directly connected* in some way physically or causally to the signified--"the index is connected to its object 'as a matter of fact.'"¹⁸ Pierce noted that photography is not only iconic but also *indexical*. The indexical character of the photograph and its attribution as a medium, which is responsible for interpreters treating it as an objective record of reality, has an important role in my inventory because it challenges the questionable belief, that the medium is a mediator of truth and a measure of reality.

¹⁸ Peirce, Charles Sanders. *Collected Writings*. Hartshorne, Charles, Ed (Cambridge: Harvard University Press)v.4. 447

Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida* (1980), explores the concept of photographic indexicality as a trace of past events, but C.S. Pierce “demonstrated that the indexical sign has less to do with its casual origins and more to do with the way in which it pointed to the event of its own inscription.”¹⁹ In the essay *From Presence to the Performative: Rethinking Photographic Indexicality* (2003), David Green and Joanna Lowry distinguish two forms of indexicality: “The one existing as a physical trace of an event, the other as performative gesture that points it. Both invoke a relationship to the real.”²⁰ Therefore, they state that photography is indexical, both by the trace of light that it leaves on photosensitive material or pixels as well as the photographic act itself. It is this act of making the photograph in which I am interested, because it is an act directly related to the trace of the action that can be translated as my presence.

One precedent of an artist using photography as documentation is Ed Ruscha. In his series of photographs titled *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations*, Ruscha took photographs of every gas station on a section of Route 66, a highway which connects Oklahoma to Los Angeles. As with Ruscha’s series, my *Inventory* was made using a systematic process for visual documentation that was decided in advance and executed without regard to the artistic.

“The central role of language is to express thoughts. Derivatively, it has at least these two roles: explaining behavior and informing us about the world. Meanings are the properties that enable it to play these roles.”²¹ Language gives arbitrary names to objects, to human beings, to shapes, to colors, to numbers. Naming is something like attaching a label to a thing. All the words in dictionaries must have been designed by someone, were then accepted by a community, and perpetuated throughout history. This process of naming involves the world, mind, and societies,

¹⁹ Green, David. *From the Presence to the Performative: Rethinking photographic Indexicality*. In: *Where is the Photograph?* Photoforum/Photoworks, 2003. 47

²⁰ Ibid, 48

²¹ Devitt, Michael, and Sterelny, Kim. *Language and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) 5

as well as the relationship with reality. The act of naming helps to define, identify, clarify and nurture the object. The simple act of naming something can be enough to bring it into existence.

At this point the process of organizing and relating the documented images to the data collected became paramount and I turned my efforts to dealing with decisions of display. I assumed that the images and the data were the same information but two different ways of expression. Finally, I decided to present the information I aspect as part separate from the images, as a form of sign text video. Therefore, the video is the result of the process of translating the photographic images into language. I named all the objects and related them to the data that I collected in Stage II. I added to each named object the information about its origin and destination, as well as the day and month that it entered or left my apartment. By doing this, I placed the objects in a specific time and space and gave them a property of the real.

The naming of the objects and their circumstances was displayed in the form of a single continuous line on a scrolling LED display. These kind of signs are common in the public sphere because they effectively meet the needs of the pace of the business world in which the time to capture the attention of potential customers is highly limited. To maintain the viewers' attention, these signs show live quotations and information, such as stock market data, breaking news, current special offers, etc. This stream of information creates a feeling of immediacy. In my video, the simulation of the information passing through in the present tense added a feeling of the here and now, heightening the idea that the exhibition was active (fig 10).

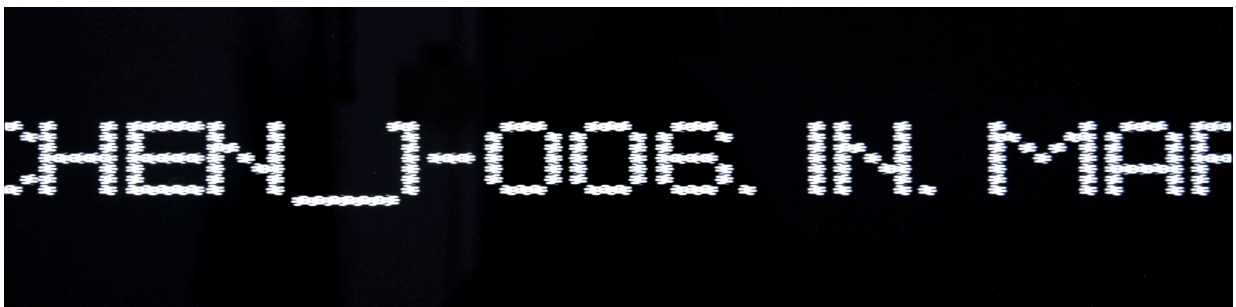


Fig. 10. *Inventory list*, Video 2011.

V. STAGE 4: DISPLAYING INVENTORY 10-01-10-30 2011

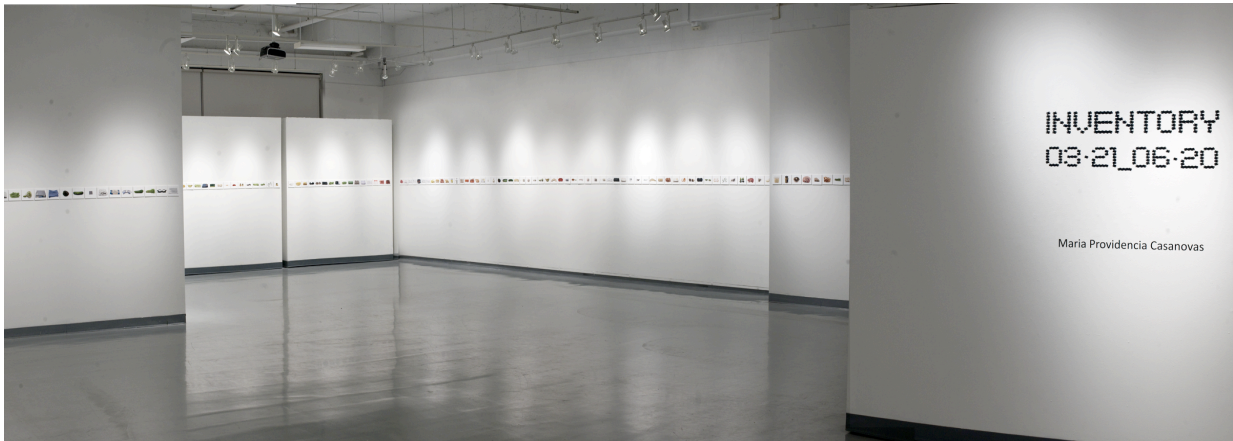


Fig. 11. *Inventory*. Installation view.

My task of finding the most effective way to show my inventory started on November 15, 2010, the day I had access to the SPAS Gallery space. Prior to that date I had considered many different possibilities, but for the first time I had to consider the impact of the physical space on the display of my inventory.

In retrospect, Boris Groys' essay *Politics of Installation* provided some insight into my task. Groys distinguishes between the standard exhibition and the artistic installation, stating that "the conventional exhibition space works as an extension of neutral, public space. The movement of the visitor through the exhibition space remains similar to that of someone walking down a street and observing the architecture of the houses left and right."²² In the artistic installation space, though, "the material support of the installation medium is the space itself. The installation transforms the empty, neutral, public space into an individual artwork—and it invites the visitor to experience this space as the holistic, totalizing space of an artwork. Anything included in such a space becomes a part of the artwork simply because it is placed inside this space."²³

²² Groys, Boris. *Politics of Installation*. e-flux journal 2 – January 2009 2

²³ Ibid 4

According to Groys, the relationship that is established between the installation space and the viewer is not democratic and “...enters the space of sovereign, authoritarian control....The visitor becomes an expatriate who must submit to a foreign law—one given to him or her by the artist. Here the artist acts as legislator, as a sovereign of the installation space—even, and maybe especially so, if the law given by the artist to a community of visitors is a democratic one.”²⁴

Once I was in the space, I decided to display my inventory edge to edge in a single row at eye level around the perimeter of the gallery (see fig.10.), which most closely matched the conceptual structure of the project. I wanted to show the objects in the same way that I had looked at them, shooting and taking notes object by object. I also worked to force the viewer to move left to right through the gallery, the same direction in which western culture reads language and also images.

In order to install my single row of images, I had the defined number of objects, and the limited perimeter wall space of the gallery to show them. The size of the photographs, (five inches wide and four inches tall), was determined by the space required to show all the photographs in a single line with a minimum spacing between (one eighth of an inch). I wanted a simple presentation, which would fuse the art with the gallery walls. The photographs were mounted on a slightly smaller piece of maple plywood, in order to minimize distraction and maximize the presence of the objects.

The process and criteria that I followed in sequencing the images was temporal. I started with the objects that came to the apartment in late March and April, 2010. Those were followed by the objects that exited during the same month. I did the same with the objects that entered and left during May and then June, 2010. Once in the gallery space, I set up three tables, and I split the images into three groups corresponding to the three months. I built the sequences, and once they were completed, I installed all of them on the walls (see fig. 13. and fig. 14.).

²⁴ Ibid. 5

Since the gallery space is a public territory, my private and intimate inventory was now placed in a public domain. The gallery became the representation of both the interior (myself) and the exterior of the apartment (the others). Public and private, inside and outside, consumer and producer, included and excluded, were mixed together in this unification that presented the exhibition as a totalizing image where gallery space, pictures, written rules and LED text sign became a total work of art.



Fig. 12. *Inventory*, entrance installation view. Placement of the rules list.



Fig.13. *Inventory*. Installation process.

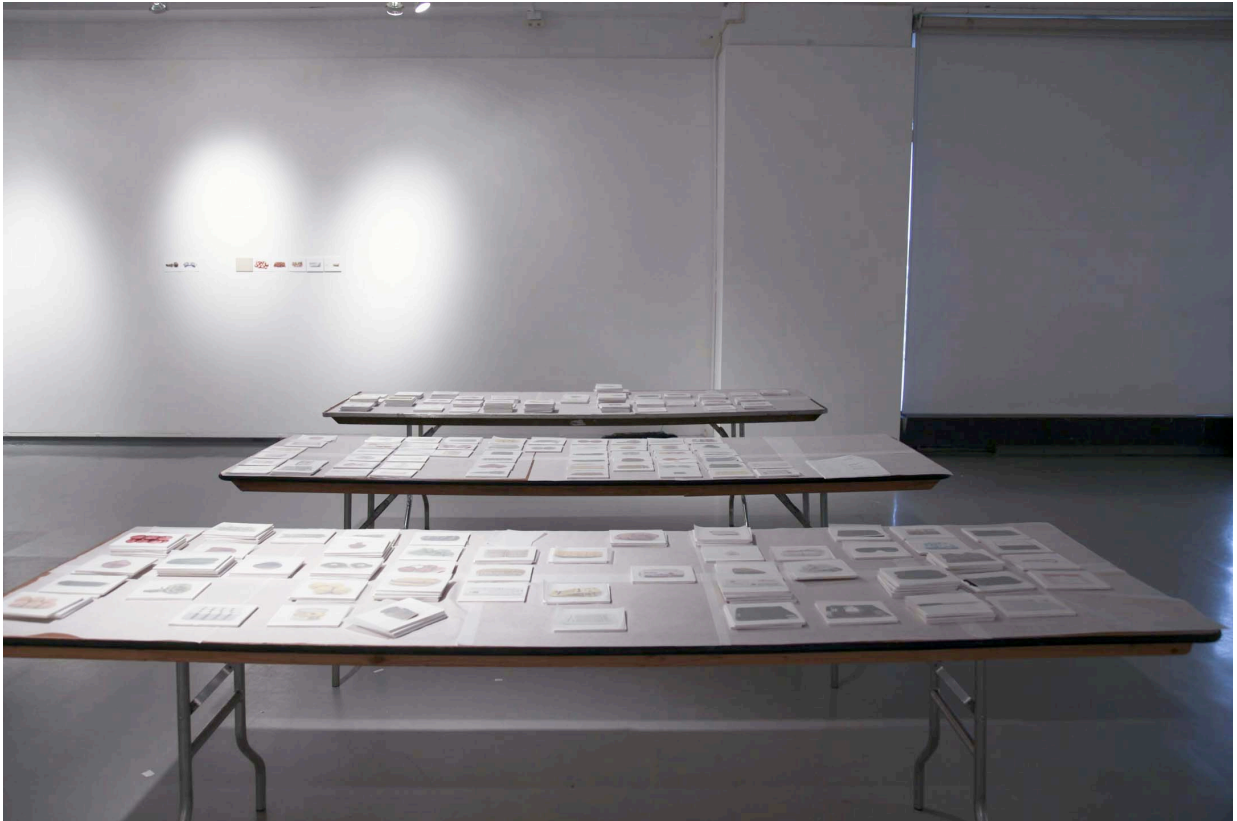


Fig. 14. *Inventory*, installation process.



Fig. 15. *Inventory*, installation view. 2010.



Fig. 16. Inventory. Installation view.

VI. CONCLUSION

This project began with my initial desire to document the contents of my domestic space over a carefully prescribed time, and my interest in creating a system by which to inventory these objects. Initially, I focused only on the objects, and I struggled to find a suitable photographic means by which to depict, catalog and analyze them. By investigating each of these items I also began to realize that something was being revealed about my own identity. In short, these objects suggested choices that I had made. They revealed something about my desires, wishes, tastes and my human-all-too human needs. As the project evolved I took the opportunity to explore theoretical issues regarding the formation of identity itself, as well as such closely related issues as the figure of authority, the ideology of representation, performance and photography, and my role as an artist in that process. In the course of examining these issues I grew as an artist and image-maker, and I confronted challenges, which went, well beyond my initial expectations.

My decision to create a set of rules to follow in the formation of the inventory was a crucial first step. In the same way that rules shape the way we live, what we do, and what we do not do, the rules that I decided to follow in the project, shaped an attitude, an experience, and what could be considered my evolving personal aesthetic. Conceptual photography has played a vital role in shaping my vision and the basic issues explored by conceptual art are obviously reflected in the project. Without this, and the critical inspiration of writers such as Georges Perec, *Inventory* would not be what it is. In fact, it might not be at all. As rule maker and archivist I have a position of authority, yet, I was also willing to share this with my committee members. I sought to give them the role of co-author of this project. I also willingly accept the futility of following the rules, their conventionality, arbitrariness, absurdity and often time, incompatibility with human nature and the state of the world. Imposing order on chaos, imputing a structure to the formless and

random comes at a cost. I did this because I cannot separate it from the art institution in which it has been created--within an art school, in a particular educational system, with a curriculum, and specific expectations, and specific professors. My position was not to confront my role as an artist within the institution, or to criticize it. It is not directed against the institution, but rather it points to the fact that this project is shaped in the context of an institution and it shows my role as an artist operating within the system. I also sought to examine what kind of relations we can establish in the institution. And perhaps this position can find its own place in the broader artistic and social context.

In the second stage, I applied the rules. It was time to experience control, order, discipline, habits and repetition. Through the practice I experienced what we call "the everyday," the boring, ordinary, odd and mundane. I had the intense desire to find in each object the extraordinary, the ideal, the original, or sublime, but my purpose was to direct my attention at just seeing each object only as it is. It was very difficult and challenging for me to keep myself in the here and now, and to maintain a kind of pseudo-objectivity with respect to each object. In order to facilitate this attention and to be more present in the practice I found a way not to involve myself fully with the object nor in what I feel or think about it. In this state between the object and subject, I could maintain myself in a position that allowed me to balance that dichotomy. I am truly interested in continuing the exploration of this 'space in between' in my future projects.

I also learned that more important than the documented objects, is the action itself, and the use of the camera as a tool by which to record and to process the experience. I was forced to make decisions in order to make the system more consistent. Over time, I also became more efficient and at ease in my working method. For example, I adopted a consistent and uniform way of arranging the objects when I was shooting them. These decisions affected the visual aesthetics of the project. Subordinating the aesthetics to the concept, focusing on the system, and the process was a liberating experience for me, and I'm sure it enabled a major change in my growth as an

artist. During this process I was forced to abandon my own preconceived values and ideas of what an aesthetic is and what is acceptable within the art. I had to be careful not to betray the system in order to provide a more engaging result for myself and for the viewer.

I especially enjoyed the final stage of working in the gallery space and installing *Inventory*. This too was a challenge. It provided the opportunity for me to put together the fragmented experience of the everyday performance. I felt I was solving a jigsaw puzzle, linking disconnected pieces in order to have at one glance my self-portrait of three months of extended and intense work. Unexpectedly, the installation process was more important than I had initially thought. I planned only two weeks for the displaying task. I wish I had given more time to the process of displaying, for unexpected decisions and last minute changes. If I could have made some of these changes, I would have printed the images in a grey neutral background instead of one hundred per cent white. I realized it was more significant to relate the images to the photographic process of representation than the commercial and advertising aspect of the project.

Inventory served to explore, challenge, extend and confirm my interests as an artist. I can say now, that my prime concern is not to develop a style or a specific aesthetic, but rather to see art as an activity that I cannot separate from my daily and quotidian life. I am a conceptual artist, deeply interested in issues related to institutional critique, and above all, by close and careful examination and reflection making art from the most ordinary aspects of my life. I want to continue investigating my role as an artist in a context of art institutions and society. I believe in art as a tool of change, and its ability to transform our personal and social relationships.

I began the project when I received the keys to my newly leased apartment. Submission of this paper coincides with the expiration of my lease. In two weeks, I will return to the nomad life, again. With my suitcase in my hand, and ready to move on, I will find a new place to live and in which to start a new project. My focus of interest for the new project, will be on the working space of a house – the studio.

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